DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 462 CG 009 231

AUTHOR Milburn, Thomas W.
TITLE Some Conditions When Perceived Threats Do and Do Not Provoke Violent Responses.
PUB DATE Aug 74
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (82nd, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Aggression; *Conflict; Emotional Response; *Interaction; Interpersonal Relationship; *Social Behavior; Speeches
IDENTIFIERS *Threat

ABSTRACT

This report discusses threats as they serve as stressors in social situations. Extreme threats and other stressors can accumulate to produce behavior changes: perceived shortened time span, diminished search for alternatives, decreased planning, increased concreteness of thought, simplification of thought process, and diminished attention to events outside the area most threatened. Threats which lack credibility are unlikely to influence behavior except to invoke some hostility. Threats work most effectively when the threatened party believes them. Bigger threats inhibit actions more effectively than smaller ones, but threats merely sufficient to do their jobs may produce the largest change of values and attitudes. Ambiguous threats may appear as noncontingent ones to their targets, in which case they are provocative. This analysis does not make many assumptions about the targets of threats, for the idea of contingency, especially as perceived by the threat target, seems adequate to explain most of the effects discussed. (Author/PC)

ED 098462

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SOME CONDITIONS WHEN PERCEIVED THREATS DO AND DO NOT PROVOKE VIOLENT RESPONSES

by

Thomas W. Milburn
Mershon Center
The Ohio State University

CG 009 231

Paper prepared for the APA Convention, New Orleans, August 30 - September 4, 1974.

SOME CONDITIONS WHEN PERCEIVED THREATS DO AND DO NOT PROVOKE VIOLENT RESPONSES

Thomas W. Milburn

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines threat primarily as the "declaration of an intention to inflict punishment, injury, death, or (at least) loss upon someone in retaliation for, conditionally, upon some action or course." Thus, threats may be seen as communications, messages which go from a source to a target. There may be audiences as well as targets to threatening messages. For a threat to be effective, first it must be received, treated as a threat, and believed. Threats are rarely isolated from demands, at least when they are parts of influence attempts; so demands must be received and believed, too. Demands must be seen as related to threats as contingencies which the threatened party can avoid by acquiescing to demands. In real life most threats between parties are conditional ones. Ordinarily, threats are unconditional only when they are to retaliate for harm already done. It is the perceived link between threat and demand that I want especially to discuss--those threats about which the threatened party expects to be able to do something. Threats may also serve as cues or discriminative stimuly of menace; they indicate that danger is coming. Volcanoes can threaten men as readily as do other men, if not so often. A communication from a person includes an intended message; but we may receive "messages" concerning the about-to-erupt volcano, or the person about to become actively psychotic or to enter insulin shock even though neither of them intends to send us a message. Threat can also be thought of as a method of social control, one which is most effective when

situational cues elicit internal guilt or anxiety. This may happen when I see a highway patrolman as I am engaged in considering exceeding the speed limit. Threats may also be regarded as punishments in themselves, as norm-defined "insults" to one's dignity or honor which, by tacit contract between the parties involved, must be avenged. Threats may be regarded as attributes of a process of the escalation of a conflict into violence where each succeeding threat evokes a more violent response. In this case, each party's defensively intended threat may not be recognized by the other as defensive in intent, and it is perception which counts most.

Threats are an aspect of power and, thus, have a relational quality: They are a function both of the resources or the source of a threat and the motives of the target. Moreover, it counts for nothing to threaten losses so small they do not matter to the target of the threat. Power is also relational, a function of one party's resources and another party's value needs. Only he who has wants and fears may be influenced by another's resources whether these appear as threats or promises. Threat is one form of coercive power. Thus, threats are part of our basic repertoire of means of mutual influence, along with promises, rewards, and punishments. We all threaten one another, if only with loss of what is valued--approval, esteem, respect, or money. Threats to inflict punishment or to withhold something are part of the power we exercise with an intent to influence one another. Threats perform essential functions in everyday social exchanges as well as in those mutual attempts to influence by the superpowers. Parents threaten children and children parents. Spouses and lovers threaten one another; so too, on occasion, do business partners and even friends. Customers and clients may threaten those who serve them through business or profession and

also contrarywise. Note that it is simply not true that threats are merely bad things that bad people ordinarily inflict upon one another--except for the case of nations. Hold-up men and extortionists may threaten, but so does almost everyone else, and threats occur at all levels of societal functioning from the individual to the nation-state. Sometimes threats appear to minorities to be the only way they see to be effective, to make themselves heard; threats for them may become substitutes for the resources they do not possess. They reflect frustration and hostility, pain more than power.

The legitimate threats of police reflect the consensually derived authority of the state as well as its physical capability to employ force. Deterrence may not be the only or even the most effective way to reduce crime, but it can be effective, and it is widely used.

Threats are critical aspects in conflicts which become crises because in some conflicts the use of threats becomes competitive and each party employs counterthreats and counterdemands, both explicitly and tacitly (i.e., physically) in response to the other's threats as both sides engage in the competitive game known as the escalatory cycle, a positive feedback loop process in control theory terms, out of control rather than homeostatically stable.

Beyond this, however, threats are an important and even essential defining element in nationhood; sovereignty constitutes the legitimate right to use force and so the threat of force to achieve order within the realm of its sway. Since World War II the biggest threat of all, that of strategic nuclear deterrence, has been a critical and very expensive aspect of U.S. and Soviet foreign policy. Deterrence has meant to turn another aside from

a course of action he might otherwise have in mind through fear of the consequences. The current situation with the superpowers involves mutual threat, the threat of assured destruction for both, given that one initiates severe acts of moral danger against the other.

Like the conflicts in which they so often are elements, threats and threatening acts are a ubiquitous part of life. If conflicts have positive and constructive aspects, as they surely have, so do threats. Threats on occasion serve as very effective modes of influence. They work when they serve as "negative bribes," when the threatened party perceives threat and demands, and anticipates feeling more secure through having acceded to the demands of the threatener and avoiding the danger.

Threats work most effectively when they threatened party believes the threatening message and "trusts" the threatener. Conditional or contingent threats serve as avoidance cues. When the threatened party has clear anticipations; he sees, understands, and believes the choices presented. He anticipates that the probability that the threat will be carried out, given that he does not accede to demands, multiplied by its size, is a significantly large figure. He also feels reasonably certain that he will gain, be negatively reinforced (through the termination of the threat), if he accedes to the demands that the threatener makes. Ideally, threats should persuade the threatened parties that by meeting demands associated with the threats, that they will influence and partially control the behavior of the threatener, reducing incentives to carry out the threat.

There are virtues to threats. Compared to promises they are inexpensive ways of insuring or preventing performance, or avoiding or compelling nonperformance. (At the same time, as Alexander George has observed, it is far

more difficult to use threat to stop an action, and still more difficult to start one, than to prevent one (George, et al., 1971). Partially this is true as an artifact of deterrence: to decide that we prevent an action we must infer, often with slim evidence since it has not yet started, that without our actions it really would have occurred.) If a target of message complies with our threat, we owe him nothing; if he complies with our promise of reward, we owe him the reward. Successfully administered threats do not call for punishment and so save costly efforts of punishing. Threats are mostly far cheaper than punishments. Threats ordinarily evoke more emotional arousal and more rapid response than do rewards; so the threatener may derive a particular sense of efficaciousness from their use.

It must be recognized, of course, that threats impose some costs upon the source of threats. A side effect of the threat may be hostility and dislike from the threatened party. Moreover, because to threaten is stressful to the target of the threat, threatening may, beyond an optimum point, lead to the target thinking more concretely, employing a shorter time-span in planning and tending to disregard consequences of his own response. Under such circumstances, too, they who perceive themselves as targets of threats may look more closely at what they conceive to be the intent of the source of threats and less at the source's capability to carry out the threat. Overweighting intent may lead a target to underestimate the linkage between threat and demand. In such a case threats provoke violent responses. A critical aspect of all of this concerns the role of perception. If I threaten another, it matters very little what contingencies (demands) I may have in mind that would stave off my threatened actions if I do not spell out these contingencies so that the other perceives them as part of

a reasonable exchange. It is not what I as a source of threat have in mind but how the target of my threat perceives it.

Threats are often intrinsic to the process of bargaining, along with offers, demands, and promises. Surely such has been the case in our relations with the Vietnamese--and still is.

I suggest that we regard the concept of threat objectively, dispassionately, with affective neutrality; it is a phenomenon familiar to all of us and one we all employ. Moreover, by all I include persons, groups, organizations, and nation-states. Because threats may evoke emotional responses and may disorganize or distort thinking and decision-making, it may be hard to regard them as objects so to be described and analyzed. But their importance and ubiquity should compel us to look upon them coolly. For one thing is certain, they do not always work. The mechanisms of threat and punishment may be only apparently simple ones so that their use may often deceive their users. It will be my suggestion that we know enough to use threats either to provoke or to inhibit violent responses even though we may not always use that knowledge or even put it altogether.

Threats almost always involve demands, the exception being when they involve retaliation. Thus threats are mostly of two general kinds:

1. To influence through stating contingencies:
   (a) unless you do X, I shall..., (b) unless you stop X, I shall...,
   (c) if you do X, I shall...;
2. To explain planned vengeance:
   (d) if you stop X, I shall..., (e) because you did X, I shall...,
   (f) you did not do X, therefore I shall...

After the Japanese attack upon the American fleet at Pearl Harbor in 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt threatened the Japanese. Winston Churchill threatened

the Germans following Dunkirk. Alex George, et al. (1971) have differentiated the effectiveness of threats intended to control in terms of how much was being asked. They argue rather convincingly that in Laos, for example, we sought to stop the march of the Communist forces; in Cuba we sought to stop emplacement and to achieve the dismantlement of missile sites. By contrast in Vietnam our rather weak initial threats accompanied some rather large demands: we sought not only to stop forward motion but also to achieve what our adversaries looked upon as a large-scale retreat. George's work, like an article of Russett's reported in the Pruitt-Snyder reader (1969), supports an exchange theory approach to the use of threat. What is threatened should relate to what is being demanded so that the two balance one another.

Very high demands (as perceived by the threatened party) serve to make threats less contingent. If, instead of money, a highwayman demands that his victims jump a fifteen-foot stream, it is unlikely that these persons will regard his threat as a seriously contingent one: He will attack them. If said highwayman demands a jump over a two-foot ditch from someone who finds the idea terrifying and so impossible, that person too will perceive the threat as noncontingent--a declaration of intent to attack--even though the highwayman did not intend it that way. We can reasonably presume that the process goes like this: If another party demands more than I can readily accomplish, more than I have, I can predict that he will indeed attack (or cause me loss) for my best efforts will not permit me to satisfy his demands. And he already has indicated that I shall suffer some loss unless I meet those unmeetable or nearly unmeetable demands. If I feel that I shall barely succeed, if at all, in meeting another's demands, I may begin to suspect

that his demands constitute a pseudocontingency, that the truth of the matter is he only seeks an excuse to inflict loss. In 1914 the Germans demanded that the Russians stop mobilizing against them prior to World War I. There was no way that the Russians could meet that demand as long as they were mobilizing against the Austro-Hungarian empire. The Russian mobilization apparatus was simply not capable of sufficiently fine tuning to be able to differentiate between the two countries. The Russians felt compelled to enter the lists against the Austrians, the more so since they had felt dishonored by the outcome of the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-9. Therefore the Russians could only treat the German demands as excuses and the German threats as noncontingent ones, really simply announcements that they would attack Russia.

Prior to the Japanese entrance into World War II against the U.S. and the British, President Roosevelt had made a series of demands that the Japanese behave less aggressively in China, or the U.S. would produce some losses upon them (Feis, 1959). And we did at one point freeze Japanese bank deposits in this country. More to the point, however, the Japanese leadership saw themselves as acquiescing to American demands only to see new demands being made. How seriously did the U.S. mean its contingencies of demands if compliance did not lead to the removal of threats? Certainly some Japanese leaders saw our threats as tending to be noncontingent ones, merely excuses for actions we wished to take.

So, a recipe for the <u>failure</u> of threats is to make them appear to be less than meaningfully and credibly contingent. You will note that I am not treating contingent-noncontingent as a dichotomy but rather as polar concepts joining and defining a continuum, the dimension of contingent-noncontingent. It would be my hypothesis that <u>the targets of threats are more likely to treat them as noncontingent in situations which are ambiguous than are the sources of threats and demands.</u>

The source of a threat may not seriously expect to have its demands met but may still prefer to make the demands because failure to meet them may serve as a kind of legitimation for the planned attack. Hitler's attack upon Poland at the start of World War II may have been an example of a pseudocontingent threat but where the false contingency could serve as, and be considered necessary to provide, an excuse for some of the audiences observing the events in question.

We have probably all heard more of the failure of another threat, that of the British and French aimed toward the Germans indicating that they would go to war against Germany unless Hitler refrained from attacking the Poles. (Actually, the famous Hossbuch memorandum had indicated that Hitler would have preferred, at least at an earlier date, not to fight the British and French until 1943. They were still on the German timetable but not for 1939.) At any rate, for various reasons, the threat of the British and French was simply not a credible one so far as the Germans were concerned (Taylor, 1961). If Hitler had been assigning subjective probabilities to the likelihood that the British and French would enter the war against him, they would have been quite low, especially because of the failure of the Western allies to reinforce their earlier deterrent threats. The failure to validate past threats against Hitler's earlier military aggrandizement amounted to a process of diminishing the credibility of any later threats against him. The meaningfulness or salience of a threat on the other hand is a function of the target's past experience.

Violent escalations of conflicts represent attempts at resolutions that are rarely cost-effective in terms of most human values, such as lives, property, society, morality, even the status order. They do function to provide information to both sides of a dispute, thus reducing ambiguity and a sense of diminished cognitive control which may have become intolerable. Ole R. Holsti's findings (1971) indicate that under

conditions of high perceived threat, decision-makers' tolerance of ambiguity decreases, and the range of available alternatives is neglected. We would expect World War II would have a very different meaning to those Germans, Japanese, British, French, Italians, and Russians who lived through it on their own territory than would be true for Americans. If one has lived through a violent war, war itself as a concept is imbued with considerably more meaning. The horror of living as a powerless civilian through a war is likely to have produced strong negative affect to war as through Pavlovian classical conditioning. Americans have not seen a war fought on American soil in more than a hundred years; it is therefore likely to be vastly more difficult for us to perceive how other nations look upon threats of war. With such divergent conditioning experiences our perceptions are so different that empathy becomes very hard.

Thomas C. Schelling (1960), among others, has argued that the source of threat may need to appear to provide evidence of some irrationality if irrational threats are to be employed. The cost of an error is so large that the question arises whether a nation should even consider counterattacking when it believes itself to be under a nuclear assault. To counterattack in error may lead to the destruction of the major civilized nations of the world and the expenditure of enormous amounts of energy. But an actual attack would destroy so much that is valued and meaningful that violently responding may appear to the remaining players to be the only meaningful way to play out life's game.

Rationality is an evaluative, a normative and rather ambiguous term. It implies that the target of the threat will act in terms of cost effective, or would employ means appropriate to the achievement of his ends. The latter to some extent implies the former. The problem with the greatest threat of all, the nuclear threat, because it involves mutual destruction,

appears less than rational by most definitions. Rationality ordinarily involves a time scale, often one long enough to be sufficient for purposes of planning. Military planners must forecast twenty years ahead where twenty years is the lifetime of a weapons system.

Perceived threats include not only a perception of various dimensions of the threat itself, such as an inferred intent behind it, but also inferences about the capability of the source of threat to carry it out and the credibility of the threat, i.e., the perceived subjective probability that it would actually be carried out under the conditions claimed for it by the source. In times of intense conflict, decision-makers may not weigh the capabilities of another so highly as their perception of his intent (Zinnes, 1972). Past experience and beliefs may make a difference in terms of credibility and in inferring intent. In the absence of more solid knowledge, ideological considerations will reign.

Threats may be thought typically to involve demands for which threats are contingencies. Among dimensions which would appear to make a difference in the effectiveness of threats is the dimension of contingent and noncontingent. The concept of contingency has grown out of the experimental analysis of behavior. It is in terms of contingencies that organisms control and are influenced by their environments. But contingent-noncontingent need not be regarded as a dichotomy. It may appear as a bipolar dimension. If the source of a threat demands more than the target can provide, the threat is in fact noncontingent. Noncontingent threats to which one assigns a moderate degree of probability call for immediate response, responses which extirpate the source of the threat. Contingent threats might be expected to lead to the modification of behavior. Noncontingent threats will not. A noncontingent threat amounts to an assertion that one will attack, that the threat will be carried out. Note, however, that if

a source of threat demands more than the target can achieve or produce, regardless of anything else the threat is noncontingent in effect. If a source demands a response in less time than the target can respond the threat is noncontingent. Related is what happens when acquiescence to the demands from the source lead to increased and larger demands. The target who is able to extrapolate the curve involved in such circumstances can perceive that the demands will eventually outrun his resources or capabilities. Moreover, his control of the situation is minimal under such circumstances, to say the least.

Some years ago, Norman R. F. Maier (1949) found evidence in humans and other organisms of what he called frustrated behavior, which contained elements of rigidity, fixation, and often explosive anger, under conditions where one felt unable to control or to escape from the threatening or punishing situation in which he found himself. I suggest the proposition that noncontingent threats or ones perceived as being in a noncontingent direction will tend to provoke violent responses as contrasted with clearly contingent ones.

Threats as messages may have more or less credibility. Most threats are credible but some are not; noncredible threats do not lead to compliance with the demands associated with them. Under such circumstances the threat does not work. If the threat does not work, it must be carried out lest future threats be even less inclined to work than they might have otherwise. Note, however, that the dimension of credibility is different from the other dimensions of which I am speaking. Credibility concerns the perception of threat. Other dimensions are more readily engineered by the source of the threat. On the perceived side minimum workable threats generate the most cognitive dissonance (Brehm and Cohen, 1962). Similarly high or low perceived probability that the threat will be carried out is

a function of the past history of the parties involved. Perhaps we should say it should be a function of the past history of the parties since this proposition is speculative.

High status sources of threat should have more credibility than low status sources of threat (Fisher, 1969). Disliked sources emit threats that are more credible on that account (Schlenker, et al., 1970). Note that this can be a stabilizing factor in international relations. If a nation has fewer resources, it can substitute more nastiness.

Withey (1962) has written of uncertain as contrasted with certain threats. Ambiguous threats in themselves would appear to lead the target to feel that he is uncertain whether he is in control of the situation, to feel greater anxiety about the threat than might be the case otherwise. The best way to control that anxiety of course is to attack; thus uncertain threats should provoke more than certain ones.

Old threats should lead to less reaction than new threats as the psychological mechanism of habituation operates. One simply gets used to an old threat. People live for years next to volcanoes with all the implicit threat that a volcano involves. New threats have far more salience. So do ones which have developed quickly rather than slowly. One of the most dangerous things about the escalation of threats between two parties in conflict is that each threat stays at a high level of salience and implies to the target that it may be going outside of the target's control.

Nardin (1968) has found that threats were less disturbing to a relationship between two parties when threat constituted the only available means of communicating. When, however, nonthreatening modes of communication also existed, threats then tended to disturb or disrupt the relationship. Of course, the context in which threats develop or emerge can be a matter of considerable importance. A combination of threat and demand may

have quite a different perceived meaning when coming from an adversary as contrasted with when it is coming from an ally. Moreover, the extent of cooperation in other spheres of activity may matter a good deal. There may be a large repertoire of kinds of ways of relating as contrasted with a smaller set. A large repertoire of ways of relating would appear to serve as a stabilizing mechanism. It should be clear what is being asserted here. It is not that cooperation per se offsets threats as far as the disruption of a relation is concerned though, of course, threats produce tensions in a relationship. Tension is one of the basic effects of threat. It is for parties with multiple ways of relating, or likely to have a number of them which remain important and treasured by both parties, that a disturbance of some cells of the relation may make less difference. As you may expect to hear from what I have indicated above, big threats relative to demands induce more conformity to source's wishes (e.g., Darley, 1966).

Only implied in the above is that there are a number of ways in which threats have stress effects. Threats serve as stressors. Stressors produce stress in the reacting organization and organisms. It is the threatened or those who perceive themselves as threatened who focus on the point of threat, upon the locus of threat, who thereby think concretely, who think in a less differentiated fashion outside the threatened area. Within a threatened area perceptions may become far more acute than usual.

What is threatened can become a matter of considerable importance. While in relations between the Soviets and the U.S. the policy of extremely high probability of total destruction is involved, ordinarily a threat may be the unavoidable one to hurt, or diminish, or destroy certain values of importance to another. This assumes that the values of another are vulnerable. Vietnam would appear to be a case to contrary. The U.S. and its

allies were slow to have a clear picture of the utility schedule and the extent of commitment to priorities held by the North Vietnamese. However, we are in a far better position to learn the priorities of the Soviet Union and of the Chinese, not only in terms of what they say but in terms of the distribution of their national budgets. The components in budgets, the amounts directed toward those components, and changes in the distribution of money throughout national budgets appear to reflect values and changes in values. We may not know the values of our adversaries and may threaten ineptly on that account. But if so, this is because we neglect to look at the world and particularly ourselves and our threats as our adversaries see them. It is not the problem itself that is intractable, it is that we neglect the matter of perception. But not only do we often fail to understand how our adversaries see the world, we fail to insure that they understand our position as we do. In this respect the SALT talks have probably been a valuable contribution to relationships between the two superpowers.

One contemporary, actively, dyadically employed concept of threat, strategic deterrence as MAD (mutual assured destruction), seems to have assumed a life of its own. From one point of view this is hard to understand. Assuming that the Soviet Union had no nuclear arsenal, what forces exist which would lead us to attack her, i.e., to issue even tacit, non-contingent threats? I suspect that in such a case we would mostly feel that we had better things to do with our strike force than to attack--except that we might be willing to make demands upon her more aggressively than is now the case. And the Soviets--would they use their strike force if they held it unilaterally? Or would there be forces within the Soviet Union effectively operating to keep them acting rationally (in a cost-effective sense), as well as ethically, even though I do not doubt but that they would in such a case behave aggressively as the chief policeman of the

planet. Each of our nuclear capabilities, the strengths behind our threats, has as its raison d'etre the strength-posed threat of the other. Each side describes itself as threatening defensively; it is unintentional that it communicates the message of offensive to the other member of the superpower team. Again, note that intended perception by the target of a threat may be quite different from the unintended ones. If neither the U.S. nor the USSR perceived itself to be threatened, in part by the very capability of the other, each could reduce the rather sizable cost of its nuclear establishment with equanimity. However, it is not always the case that either side source perceives how the other, as target, perceives the complex multitude of threats pointed its way. This may be another example of a more general human phenomenon, one I have implied earlier, that many threats or aspects of threats, such as demands, may be communicated unintentionally and by inadvertence. I believe that this is because we hesitate to make the contingencies we have in mind at all explicit--often lest we thereby restrict our freedom of action, occasionally because we have not thought them through, but also it may happen that we are unaware of the implied degree of noncontingenciness associated with our threats.

To function well together the superpowers need to be able to see and predict accurately the perceptions and responses of one another and, as a second-order perception, to understand that the messages that they as threat sources emit are thoroughly understood (Scheff, 1967). More attention to the way the other perceives threats enables one to assure that threats designed to inhibit are less likely to provoke violence.

My central hypothesis is this: threats are always relative to demands. It is the fear of being powerless unless one acts violently now which drives men to attack. It is clear that if one is powerless already,

there is less tendency for aggressive panic. And if one appears (1) to have the most to gain and (2) is more likely to remain in control through the relative passivity of nonviolence, a violent response becomes extremely improbable.

A second hypothesis is that it is not the demands and contingent threats in themselves which excite to violence or inhibit such inclinations, but the perceptions of the threat and demand combination by the target to them. These perceptions are likely themselves to be functions not only of the acts of the source of the threat but also of the history of their relationship, and the target's culture, history (recent memories), and the situations in which they both find themselves (Milburn, 1969).

Summary

Threats produce some general effects; they serve as stressors. When effects are extreme the effects of threat and other stressors, e.g., demands for action, time pressure, the effects can cumulate to produce well-known effects: shortened time span, diminished search for alternatives, decreased planning, increased concreteness of thought, simplification of thought process, diminished attention to events outside the point or area most threatened, or where demands focus. But threats differ in their effects, and not all of these are functions of the nature of the target. To some extent they are of the relation between the source and the target. Very strong effects are produced by threats which are noncontingent ones or perceived as such by those receiving them. Such threats should be most likely of all to provoke defensive violence since they are perceived as announcements of highly probable forthcoming attacks.

Threats which lack credibility simply are unlikely to influence behavior except to invoke some hostility. Low credibility threats are therefore

especially likely to lead to acts to validate them, to show that they are really meant seriously. So, less credible threats may more often lead to counterresponses which, in turn, may evoke violence from the original source of the threat.

Threats low on meaningfulness simply do not count much in the minds of the targets to them. Their reactions can be simply, "so carry out your threat." Bigger threats inhibit actions more effectively than smaller ones, but threats merely sufficient to do their jobs may produce the largest change of values and attitudes. Ambiguous threats may, in periods of heightened conflict, appear as noncontingent ones to their targets, in which case they are provocative.

What are key elements in the above? Contingent threats which offer the possibility of more control of the situation for compliance with demands, where the cost of compliance in terms of face or national honor is not overly large, and where some gain from compliance seems possible, may indeed evoke compliance. That is, they may inhibit, assuming they are credible, meaningful (which subsumes large).

Threats which are less contingent will provoke if credible and meaningful. Threats which are neither credible or meaningful are likely to be ignored. Certainly the demands associated with them are unlikely to be met.

Note that it has not been necessary to make many assumptions about the targets of threats in this analysis, not to assume that they would fight to avoid a loss of even cognitive control of the threat situations in which they are immersed, even though such may indeed be the case. The idea of contingency, especially as perceived by the target of the threat, seems adequate to explain most of the effects we have been discussing.

REFERENCES

Brehm, J. W. and Cohen, A. R. Explorations in cognitive dissonance. New York: Wiley and Sons, 1962.

Darley, J. M. Fear and social comparison as determinants of conformity behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 4, 73-78.

Feis, H. The road to Pearl Harbor. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1959.

Fisher, R. International conflict for beginners. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

George, A. L., Hall, D. K., and Simons, W. R. The limits of coercive diplomacy: Laos, Cuba, Vietnam. Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1971.

Holsti, O. R. Crisis, stress, and decision-making. International Social Science Journal, 1971, 23, 53-67.

Maier, N. R. F. Frustration: the study of behavior without a goal. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949.

Milburn, T. W. Intellectual history of a research program. In Pruitt, D.G. and Snyder, R. C. (Eds.) Theory and research on the causes of war. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969, 263-283.

Nardin, T. Communication and the effects of threats in strategic interaction. Peace Research Society (International), 1968, 9, 69-86.

Russett, B. M. Refining deterrence theory: the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In Pruitt, D. G. and Snyder, R. C. Theory and research on the causes of war. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969, 127-135.

Scheff, T. A theory of social coordination applicable to mixed-motive games. Sociometry, 1967, 30, 215-234.

Schelling, T. C. The strategy of conflict. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Schlenker, B. R., Bonoma, T. V., Tedeschi, J. T., and Pivnick, W. P. Compliance to threats as a function of the wording of the threat and the exploitiveness of the threatener. Sociometry, 1970, 33, 394-408.

Taylor, A. J. P. The origins of the second world war. (2nd Edition) Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1961.

Withey, S. B. Reaction to uncertain threat. In Baker, G. W. and Chapman, D. W. (Eds.) Man and society in disaster. New York: Basic Books, 1962.

Zinnes, Dina A., Zinnes, J. L., and McClure, R. D. Hostility in diplomatic communication: a study of the 1914 crisis. In Hermann, C. F. (Ed.) International crises: insights from behavioral research. New York: The Free Press, 1972, 139-162.